

A Legacy of Female Autonomy During the Crusades:

Queen Melisende of Jerusalem

“A very wise woman, fully experienced in almost all affairs of state business, who completely triumphed over the handicap of her sex so she could take charge of important affairs...”¹

Introduction

The Middle Ages represented a transitory period in regard to female jurisdiction and the extent to which females could exercise any degree of political influence. Characterized as sinful temptresses, heiresses to the legacy of Eve, or weak individuals that lacked the physical strength to govern, women were placed in subjugating roles and were expected to adhere to the wishes of their husbands. Biblical authority reinforced these standards, reaffirming that a woman's role was to support her husband's needs and produce offspring.² However, a female's position was not seen as unimportant. For example, in royal families, the maintenance of a dynasty was a matter of the utmost priority. As such, a woman could provide an invaluable service through bearing children. Despite this, it was extremely difficult for a woman to transition from bearing children to exerting power over day to day life. While multiple women in Europe during the Middle Ages attempted to become rulers, most failed in their pursuits due to the rigid, unadaptable structure of society.³

However, certain women such as Melisende of Jerusalem and the Christian noblewoman Tamta, both females of Armenian descent who gained power over

¹ “Queens Regnant: Melisende of Jerusalem – A wise Queen,” History of Royal Women, <https://www.historyofroyalwomen.com/the-royal-women/queens-regnant-melisende-jerusalem/>

² “Women in Medieval Society.” The British Library, The British Library, 17 Jan. 2014, www.bl.uk/the-middle-ages/articles/women-in-medieval-society.

³ Phillips, Jonathan. *Holy Warriors: a Modern History of the Crusades*. Vintage Digital, 2012.

territories despite their gender, reflect a notable shift in the preexisting ruling system. The two, throughout their lifetimes, overcame societal expectations relating to their genders.⁴ Their ability to gain power reflects a new era during which certain individuals gained a greater ability to progress within society without being completely confined by their birth status. Through females attaining a previously unseen level of sovereign power, they defined themselves as being irreplaceable.⁵ This acted in direct contrast to the stories of individuals like the Armenian noblewoman Arda, who, before the reigns of both Melisende and Tamta, was married to Baldwin I to solidify relations between Jerusalem and the Christians of northern Syria. However, despite originally believing that she would become the queen of the region, after six years Arda was cast aside by Baldwin, who hoped to attain greater wealth through another marriage. She fled the region and settled in Constantinople, where she became a prostitute.⁶ As such, comparatively analyzing Melisende and Tamta against women like Arda portrays the significant shift in roles that occurred within a hundred years, exposing the degree to which women were granted the ability to function as individuals instead of mere pawns utilized for solidifying treaties and birthing children.

The reigns of women like Tamta and Melisende function as intricate social and political tools defining relationships between female sovereigns and their subjects. Specifically, Melisende's rule and her lasting contributions, seen in the form of structural

⁴ Tranovich. *Queen Melisende of Jerusalem. The World of a Forgotten Crusader Queen*. Melisende, 2011.

⁵ Eastmond. *Tamta's World: The Life and Encounters of a Medieval Noblewoman from the Middle East to Mongolia*. East & West Publishing, 2011.

⁶ "A Woman of Unusual Wisdom and Discretion – Queen Melisende of Jerusalem," Erenow, <https://erenow.com/postclassical/holywarriorsamodernhistoryofthecrusades/4.html>

and artistic designs, relay the extent to which a female was able to impact an area's people and legacy. Moreover, historical texts and images of Melisende portray varying public opinions and expectations for a female ruler. In fact, the level of her shared authority within the context of joint rule becomes contested, therefore depicting the failures, difficulties, and successes experienced by a woman attempting to pave a new path for female rulers.⁷ This paper will attempt to explain Melisende's path of rule and how it displays an unseen form of female influence within the Middle Ages despite many setbacks and deterrents.

Historical Context

Melisende, the future queen of Jerusalem, was born in 1105 in the Crusader state of Edessa. As the daughter of Baldwin of Boulogne, the count of Edessa, and Morphia of Melitene, a couple who produced no male heirs, she stood in direct line to the throne.⁸ At the time, the kingdom of Jerusalem acted as a center for many religious groups, as well as a holy place for Christians due to it being the place where Christ died and was resurrected.⁹ Before Melisende, Jerusalem was accustomed to male rulers. The first Frankish ruler of Jerusalem, Godfrey of Bouillon, who gained power after the crusaders stormed the city, was known to refuse the title of king, but continued to preside over the kingdom under the title of Advocate of the Holy Sepulchre.

⁷ Tranovich. *Queen Melisende of Jerusalem. The World of a Forgotten Crusader Queen*. Melisende, 2011.

⁸ Jansen, Sharon L. "The Monstrous Regiment of Women." *Carrie Chapman Catt: Suffragist, Political Activist, Organizer*, www.monstrousregimentofwomen.com/2015/08/melisende-queen-of-jerusalem.html.

⁹ "Melisende – A True Queen," Loyola History Journal, <http://people.loyno.edu/~history/journal/1998-9/Edie.htm#6>

Melisende's father, Baldwin II, was crowned as king in 1100 after being elected into the role by the High Court of Jerusalem.¹⁰ Having four daughters and no sons, Baldwin II chose to provide Melisende with ruling status instead of bestowing the honor upon a male relative, and attempted to sway the public eye in her favor. From an early age, Baldwin II had Melisende sign contracts bearing his name so she would gain the respect of both commoners and the nobility.¹¹ As a man, this was an intriguing choice; even Melisende's mother was originally treated as a means to obtain financial support and obtain political connections. However, throughout their partnership, his wife, Morphia, became a political partner to her husband, aiding him in his conquests. As the Armenian mother of Melisende was granted a degree of power through her husband's authority, this signaled the start of an era granting females more authority and jurisdiction.¹²

Despite attempting to empower Melisende by allowing her to sign important documents, Baldwin II recognized a need for her to marry an influential man. In due course, he requested that the King of France propose a husband for her. In response, Fulk d'Anjou, the ruler of a small, yet powerful, territory in the middle of France was selected as Melisende's future husband. Fulk was deemed a suitable match due to his ruling expertise and military experience.

¹⁰ "Queen Melisende of Jerusalem." *Weapons and Warfare*, Weapons and Warfare, 13 Oct. 2016, weaponsandwarfare.com/2016/10/14/queen-melisende-of-jerusalem/.

¹¹ Tranovich. *Queen Melisende of Jerusalem. The World of a Forgotten Crusader Queen*. Melisende, 2011.

¹² "Queen Melisende of Jerusalem." *Reconesse Database - Delmira Agustini*, beta.reconesse.org/past/queen-melisende-of-jerusalem-1105-1161/.

When asked to marry Melisende, the response was positive; however, some sources claim that he asked to be named king after their nuptials were finalized.¹³ Fulk's desire for power pervaded their marriage, eventually leading to intense emotional turmoil, as well as a power struggle. Fulk had relinquished his position as count of Anjou in the attempt to become the sole ruler of Jerusalem. However, upon King Baldwin's death, he made the distinct choice to place three individuals in power: Fulk, Melisende, and their young son Baldwin III. Baldwin II made the distinct choice to revoke his previous promise to Fulk that he would be made sole ruler, likely to prevent Jerusalem from falling into Anjou rule. Instead, he ensured that Melisende, her husband, and her son shared rule through a joint system.¹⁴

Granting Melisende, a woman, such a high degree of royal authority plunged the kingdom into a state of monarchical and social crisis. Her reign bridged the time between the establishment of the Crusader kingdoms, the rule of the first Crusaders, and the loss of Jerusalem to the Muslims in 1187, and marked a significant turning point for females. However, it involved many obstacles.¹⁵ Despite being jointly crowned alongside her son and husband, and not ruling alone as a female, Melisende's rule was extremely contested. She faced fierce opposition from men who were vehemently opposed to sharing power with a woman. Despite confronting men in power that were older, more experienced, and extremely judgmental, Melisende maintained authority in

¹³ "Melisende." *Helena P. Schrader*, www.crusaderkingdoms.com/melisende.html.

¹⁴ Mayer, Hans Eberhard. "Studies in the History of Queen Melisende of Jerusalem." *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, vol. 26, 1972, p. 93., doi:10.2307/1291317.

¹⁵ Tranovich. *Queen Melisende of Jerusalem. The World of a Forgotten Crusader Queen*. Melisende, 2011.

spite of constant resistance. She refused to leave the public stage and continually challenged the beliefs of her husband, Fulk, and her son, Baldwin III.¹⁶ Melisende overturned women's conventional roles as being emotionally, morally, and politically inferior to men. She prevailed despite having her personal reputation attacked through false rumors of an alleged affair with Count Hugh of Jaffa; this attempted to discredit her authority and turn the public against her.

However, in the face of these obstacles, Melisende not only prevented the public and the nobility from turning against her, but gained their support.¹⁷ For instance, when the resident nobility, led by Count Hugh of Jaffa, revolted, Melisende, breaking out of conventional gender roles, chose to oppose her husband, along with his followers. In response, the nobles openly supported her despite having the option to follow a male ruler, depicting Melisende's true power to enact progress in regard to gender barriers. Emphasizing her great ability, despite Melisende jointly ruling with men, the nobles turned to her and not her son or husband for the future of Jerusalem, believing that she was the ruler best equipped to ensure Jerusalem's present and future success. After the revolt, Fulk chose to work together with Melisende, and the two governed the kingdom jointly as intended. Sources claim Fulk did not act without consulting Melisende for the rest of their marriage.¹⁸

¹⁶ "Twelfth-Century Girl Power." *Asian and African Studies Blog*, blogs.bl.uk/digitisedmanuscripts/2013/08/twelfth-century-girl-power.html.

¹⁷ "A Woman of Unusual Wisdom and Discretion – Queen Melisende of Jerusalem," Erenow, <https://erenow.com/postclassical/holywarriorsamodernhistoryofthecrusades/4.html>

¹⁸ Mayer, Hans Eberhard. "Angevins versus Normans: The New Men of King Fulk of Jerusalem." *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* Vol. 133, No. 1 (Mar., 1989) p. 2

When Fulk died in a freak accident after his horse was spooked by a rabbit, Melisende was provided with the chance to rule as her son's regent. For the first time in her life, her authority was unchecked by any male relative, as her sons were only six and thirteen.¹⁹ As such, Melisende asserted her dominance through her new role, and both her and her son, Baldwin III, were crowned together in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. However, he was far too young to make any decisions.

Representing her wish to maintain power, Melisende ruled until after Baldwin III reached the age of fifteen, which was the age of majority. In fact, she ruled seven years more than she should have as regent.²⁰ In response, at the age of twenty two, Baldwin III, becoming tired of living under his mother's rule, demanded that he be crowned as ruler instead. Melisende, not wanting to give up the unique opportunity for a female to rule over Jerusalem, requested that Baldwin allow the two of them to rule together.²¹ However, Baldwin III, as an adult male accustomed to having to obey his mother's wishes and desires, was not in the mood to compromise.

Consequently, Melisende's son chose to secretly arrange a separate crowning that would confirm him as sole ruler. When his request for a second coronation was denied, Baldwin III, determined to obtain the power granted by hereditary succession, chose to flagrantly march through the streets of Jerusalem while wearing a crown of laurels on his head. This choice reflects not only his overwhelming desire to rule, but

¹⁹ Hamilton, Bernard. "Women in the Crusader States: The Queens of Jerusalem (1100-1190)." *Studies in Church History. Subsidia*, vol. 1, 1978, pp. 143–174., doi:10.1017/s0143045900000375.

²⁰ Slack, Corliss Konwiser, and Corliss Konwiser Slack. *The A to Z of the Crusades*. Scarecrow Press, 2009.

²¹ Runciman, Steven. "The Crown of Jerusalem." *Palestine Exploration Quarterly*, vol. 92, no. 1, 1960, pp. 8–18., doi:10.1179/peq.1960.92.1.8.

also depicts his need to assert authority over his mother, who he had been estranged from for the last two years.²²

However, when the disagreement was brought to Jerusalem's royal council, its final decision was not in Baldwin's favor. Instead of granting him sole authority, the council divided Jerusalem into two distinct districts, one that Baldwin would preside over and one that Melisende would preside over. Specifically, Baldwin was granted the northern region of Galilee and the cities of Acre and Tyre. On the other hand, Melisende received authority over Jerusalem, Nablus, and the coast. It is important to note that Melisende's holdings were seen as more desirable than those of Baldwin, thus creating more animosity between the two. Moreover, neither was overly content about the decision, with both Melisende and Baldwin III wanting to rule alone.²³

Baldwin III's response created more conflict in Melisende's life, adding to turmoil created by her already tumultuous relationship with Fulk and the many controversies surrounding a female in a position of power. Instead of accepting the council's proposal, he invaded Melisende's territory in the south. After obtaining control over multiple regions that Melisende controlled, including those of Manasses and Nablus, Jerusalem opened its gates to him. A peace treaty settling the affair allowed Melisende to only retain possession of Nablus. However, after Melisende and her son reconciled in 1154, Baldwin allowed his mother to act as regent when he was away on business. Through

²² "Baudouin III, Roi De Jérusalem." *geni_family_tree*, 29 Mar. 2018, www.geni.com/people/Baudouin-III-roi-de-Jérusalem/6000000001501000954.

²³ Tranovich. *Queen Melisende of Jerusalem. The World of a Forgotten Crusader Queen*. Melisende, 2011.

this, as well as her possession of Nablus, Melisende was able to retain political power throughout the rest of her life.²⁴

On September 11, 1161, Melisende, the victim of an incurable, unknown disease, died. She was buried in Jerusalem at the Tomb of the Virgin, where her mother was buried. However, she left behind a strong legacy, depicting the extent of her power and influence.²⁵ As aforementioned, the goal of this paper is to explore Melisende's lasting influence and reveal how she acted as a transformative force for women. I intend to support my contention through analyzing documents regarding Melisende, describing structures that she influenced, and comparing her to another noblewoman who interacted with men in power. Additionally, through briefly touching upon scholarly perspectives on Melisende, I will further prove that she emblemized womanly power within the Middle Ages.

Historical Analysis, Data, and Scholarly Debate

Multiple documents about Melisende, as well as the structures she helped design and finance, portray the overwhelming progress regarding gender relations and female authority that occurred during her life. As such, these materials offer contemporary readers a glimpse into historical events of the time period. They also provide insight regarding Melisende's reactions to these events. Through analyzing historical sources that relay the public's perception of her, the many obstacles Melisende faced become clear, as well as the modes through which she proved herself to be an adequate and

²⁴ "Baudouin III, Roi De Jérusalem." *geni_family_tree*, 29 Mar. 2018, www.geni.com/people/Baudouin-III-roi-de-Jérusalem/6000000001501000954.

²⁵ Tranovich. *Queen Melisende of Jerusalem. The World of a Forgotten Crusader Queen*. Melisende, 2011.

successful leader. Moreover, a comparison between her experiences and those of the Christian noblewoman Tamta depicts the degree of success Melisende obtained.

As such, combining all of these sources provides insight into how perceptions of the monarchy and the social situation challenged Melisende, who, through great resilience, transformed herself into an example of great female power within the Middle Ages. I will argue that she left a legacy that created and defined new possibilities for the female experience. However, I recognize that those who followed her, lacking the same inherent qualities that she possessed, unfortunately failed to obtain the same level of success.²⁶ Despite this, Melisende's approach to males attempting to force her out of power revolutionizes relationships between men and women, showing women how to fight against men instead of conforming to them.

To analyze Melisende's achievements, it is first important to discuss public perceptions of her. After the transfer of power from Baldwin II to Fulk, Melisende, and Baldwin III, many different interpretations of Melisende's role within this relationship arose.²⁷ William of Tyre, an archbishop, wrote of "Melisende...[ruling] the kingdom with fitting moderation for more than thirty years, during the lifetime of her husband, and the reign of her son." However, an analysis of his wording reveals the "uncertainty [he possessed] about the relative status of Melisende with respect to her husband and son...[which] was clearly an issue for the political classes in Jerusalem." The clear choice of the words "fitting moderation" places Melisende in a seemingly uninfluential

²⁶ "Melisende – A True Queen," Loyola History Journal, <http://people.loyno.edu/~history/journal/1998-9/Edie.htm#6>

²⁷ Mayer, Hans Eberhard. "Studies in the History of Queen Melisende of Jerusalem." *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, vol. 26, 1972, p. 93., doi:10.2307/1291317.

role, while also confining her to her birth status. Additionally, William's interpretation of Melisende's ability to influence matters within the kingdom places emphasis upon the men she is ruling with; he specifically states that her moderative rule continues through both her husband's life and the reign of her son.

While this interpretation relays that Melisende's power was long lasting, other accounts portray her as a temporary ruler who would soon lose influence. A French translator is quoted as stating that "Baldwin III...was crowned on Christmas day...his mother wore the crown with him, because there was no queen as wife of this young king." The text asserts that Melisende obtained royal power through Baldwin III not having a wife to preside over affairs. As such, she is depicted as replaceable. Moreover, her temporary power would be removed as a result of a man's choice to replace her with a wife.²⁸ As seen through these depictions of Queen Melisende, her retention of sovereign power did nothing to dissuade the public from doubting her ability to maintain authority. Despite Melisende being placed in line to the throne by her father, this account from 13th century France, occurring a hundred years later, "demonstrates how the eye of thirteenth-century France saw events very differently from that of twelfth century Jerusalem...her importance is ascribed to a different set of familial relationships."²⁹

These portrayals reveal how much public interpretations of Melisende varied. She was tasked with the responsibility of appeasing individuals who did not respect her

²⁸ Dresvina, Juliana, and Nicholas Sparks. *Authority and Gender in Medieval and Renaissance Chronicles*. Cambridge Scholars, 2013.

²⁹ Dresvina, Juliana, and Nicholas Sparks. *Authority and Gender in Medieval and Renaissance Chronicles*. Cambridge Scholars, 2013.

hereditary status as a ruler. Melisende received varying amounts of support from her subjects and the nobles that surrounded her in court. It can be assumed that her rule was judged harshly, with many watching her every move.

Images portraying the crowning of her alongside her son also differ in their interpretations of their relationship. In particular, a case study of Melisende's representation in portraits evokes questions pertaining to representation of women in the Middle Ages. In one portrayal of the coronation, Figure 1³⁰, "Melisende is depicted at the coronation but not represented crowned or enthroned...[a possibly] deliberate attempt to sideline Melisende." The translator, as suggested by the image's description, promoted the need for powerful female figures to wear a crown. If they were uncrowned, he believed they could not be considered true rulers, a reflection that stemmed from French nationalistic principles. As such, Melisende not wearing the crown in the portrait would depict her lack of true royal power.

However, this is contrasted with another perspective regarding this image. It first describes how Melisende's hand gestures in the portrait provide her with a degree of autonomy. Moreover, this depiction shows that Baldwin III and Melisende have their gaze fixed upon one another. This is proposed as an artistic choice depicting the type of communication that should occur between joint rulers. However, at the same time, as Baldwin III still wears the crown and not Melisende, who was acting as regent, the artist seems to lack of faith regarding the queen presiding over her son. Moreover, the choice to place the crown on a man's head, despite him not being of age to rule, perpetuates

³⁰ Found in Appendix

sentiments regarding women continuing to occupy domestic spheres and not presiding over nations and territories.³¹

On the other hand, other historical accounts, such as the work of Mas Latrie entitled *La Chronique d'Ernoul et de Bernard le Tresorier*, not only discredit Queen Melisende but leave her out of history entirely. Accounts like these falsely interpret history to remove female influence from the public record. In this case, while Queen Melisende is “not named or given political significance...Mas Latrie completely takes the creation of the monastery at Bethany out of her hands as well and places it firmly in the hands of her father King Baldwin II...[despite] William of Tyre and other leading historians [showing] this to be Melisende’s personal project.”³² This flagrant misrepresentation of the past perpetuates discreditation of women. Not crediting the person who worked on the project, and transferring recognition to the woman’s father depicts almost insurmountable barriers for females hoping to be remembered for their contributions.

Melisende was buried in Jerusalem at the Tomb of the Virgin in the valley of Jehoshaphat.³³ This was the continuation of a tradition that buried queens near the tomb of Virgin Mary, while kings were placed near the tomb of Christ.³⁴ Through not placing Melisende in the resting place akin to that of Christ, she became physically trapped by the gender barriers she was fighting against her entire life. Placing her

³¹ Folda, Jaroslav. “Images of Queen Melisende in Manuscripts of William of Tyres History of Outremer: 1250-1300.” *Gesta*, vol. 32, no. 2, 1993, pp. 97–112., doi:10.2307/767168.

³² “Melisende – A True Queen,” Loyola History Journal, <http://people.loyno.edu/~history/journal/1998-9/Edie.htm#6>

³³ Guest. “Jerusalem in the Time of the Crusades.” *Epdf.tips*, EPDF.TIPS, epdf.tips/jerusalem-in-the-time-of-the-crusades.html.

³⁴ *Church of the Holy Sepulchre*, churchoftheholyssepulchre.net/.

corpse in the resting place of the Virgin Mary without a marker, sign, or grave leads to her being equated with women who were subservient to their male counterparts.³⁵

Focusing upon Melisende's successes throughout her marriage, the early revolts of the nobility against her husband, led by Count Hugh, resulted in her husband, Fulk, attempting to discredit her within the public sphere. Seeing an opportunity to remove both his wife and Count Hugh from favor, Fulk created false allegations about them engaging in an affair. Despite the possibility of an affair between Melisende and Count Hugh being almost impossible due to Melisende being frequently attended to by ladies in waiting and other servants, the rumors were widespread. This led to Melisende's increasing contempt for Fulk. Fulk had attempted to utilize Hugh, a relative of Melisende, as a "convenient pretext he wanted to rid himself of Melisende, but he regretted this decision when faced with Melisende's wrath."³⁶ In response, Melisende chose to challenge her husband's claims and successfully gained his respect. For the rest of his life, he chose to "not act without the knowledge of his Queen even in matters of little or no consequence," and his partisans were not allowed to introduce themselves to her.³⁷

Attempting to reconcile with her, it is believed that Fulk commissioned the Melisende Psalter, an illuminated manuscript that contained Latin text, as well as twenty four images of the life of Christ. Scholars believe that it was a symbol of their

³⁵ Tranovich. *Queen Melisende of Jerusalem. The World of a Forgotten Crusader Queen*. Melisende, 2011.

³⁶ "A Woman of Unusual Wisdom and Discretion – Queen Melisende of Jerusalem," Erenow, <https://erenow.com/postclassical/holywarriorsamodernhistoryofthecrusades/4.html>

³⁷ Mayer, Hans Eberhard. "Studies in the History of Queen Melisende of Jerusalem." *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, vol. 26, 1972, p. 93., doi:10.2307/1291317.

commitment to each other after the revolt. This is due to the death of Baldwin II being listed, but not the death of Fulk, implying that he was alive when the piece was commissioned. Representing Melisende, the psalter merges both Eastern and Western influences.³⁸

Moreover, the church decided to support Melisende, even granting Count Hugh a reprieve from harsh punishment.³⁹ Analyzing Melisende's actions, her ability to persuade various men, as well as the church, to support her actions over those of her husband, define her as a female who successfully was able to break down gender barriers. Despite living in a period where women were "seen as weaker, less intelligent, and otherwise less fit than men for most tasks," Melisende gained the support of religious leaders and demonstrated her ability to influence her husband's followers and his decisions.⁴⁰

Transitioning to Melisende's reign after her husband's death and successes in the face of controversy, certain accounts portray the various expectations for a female ruler that had no man guiding her. Further showcasing gender inequality, a letter from Bernard of Clairvaux, a French abbot, reveals the great prejudice against women in rule, exposing social cleavages that resonated throughout the Middle Ages. However, despite these gender disparities, his letter also reveals male faith in Melisende's ability to rule effectively. Writing to Melisende in the wake of her husband's death, Bernard first

³⁸ "Melisende Psalter." *The British Library*, The British Library, 14 Jan. 2015, www.bl.uk/collection-items/melisende-psalter.

³⁹ Mayer, Hans Eberhard. "Studies in the History of Queen Melisende of Jerusalem." *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, vol. 26, 1972, p. 93., doi:10.2307/1291317.

⁴⁰ *Women in the Middle Ages | Middle Ages - The Finer Times*. www.thefinertimes.com/Middle-Ages/women-in-the-middle-ages.html.

claims that “the glory of your kingdom, your power, and the line of your nobility. All of these are seen by the eyes of men,” thus depicting that Melisende, as a woman, would not have influence over these sectors. Another perspective acknowledges that this statement could be speaking about the eyes of men watching her every action.

However, in the next paragraph, Bernard claims that in the wake of Fulk’s death, she must “show a man in a woman...must dispose all things so prudently and moderately that all who seen them will think you are a king rather than a queen from your acts.” Despite displaying faith in Melisende’s ability to rule, by insisting that she rule like a man instead of rule like a woman, Bernard of Clairvaux portrays that men are the only individuals that act as effective rulers.⁴¹ As such, a woman was not entitled to rule in her own right, and could only hope to emulate the actions of the men who had ruled before her. Despite her husband having caused various rifts and revolts throughout their marriage, and her having continually acted to preserve the wellbeing of Jerusalem’s people, Melisende was still told to cast aside her birth status, revealing the unadaptable nature of society. Even though she was placed in a position of power by a man, her father, and told of her capable nature by another man, the abbot, she could not escape the gender roles that confined her.⁴²

However, in response to this, Melisende rose to the task of performing her role as a man would. Referring to William of Tyre again, he is quoted as stating that Melisende “[rose] so far above the normal status of women that she dared to undertake

⁴¹ “A Letter from Bernard of Clairvaux, Abbot (1143-44).” *Radegund of Thuringia | Epistolae*, epistolae.ctl.columbia.edu/letter/246.html.

⁴² Huneycutt, Lois. “Female Succession and the Language of Power in the Writings of Twelfth-Century Churchmen.” John Carmi Parsons, 1998

important measures. It was her ambition to emulate the magnificence of the greatest and noblest princes and to show herself in no way inferior to them.” Realizing that she would have to rule as previous male rulers did, Melisende, in William of Tyre’s words, “ruled the kingdom and administered the government with such skillful care that she may be said to truly have equaled her ancestors in that respect.”⁴³ As such, Melisende became unrivaled by other women of the time period, who were consistently placed in inferior roles in comparison to men. Through displaying the type of leadership men expected from a ruler, she paved a path for future females in power.

As a comparison point, the Christian noblewoman Tamta also gained power throughout her lifetime; however, she suffered much more physical turmoil than Melisende. Passing through the hands of various elite men, she was seen as a disposable object that males could use for their own satisfaction. After her father was captured during a siege, she was ransomed in marriage. Upon marrying Ayyubid al-Awhad, she was then passed onto his brother, al-Ashraf, when he died.⁴⁴ Later in life, she was raped by the leader of the Khwarazmshah invaders, who came from a Muslim dynasty of Turkic mamluk origin. After marrying him, she was captured by the Mongols. However, luckily for Tamta, the Mongols chose to empower her, granting her the ability to rule independently in Eastern Anatolia.⁴⁵

⁴³ “Melisende – A True Queen,” Loyola History Journal, <http://people.loyno.edu/~history/journal/1998-9/Edie.htm#6>

⁴⁴ Hazelton, and Claire Kohda. “Tamta's World: The Life and Encounters of a Medieval Noblewoman from the Middle East to Mongolia”, by Antony Eastmond - Review.” *List of Books and Articles about Euthanasia* |Online Research Library: Questia, National Association of Social Workers, www.questia.com/magazine/1P4-1917443503/tamta-s-world-the-life-and-encounters-of-a-medieval.

⁴⁵ Eastmond. Tamta's World: The Life and Encounters of a Medieval Noblewoman from the Middle East to Mongolia. East & West Publishing, 2011.

Despite her life occurring about a hundred years after that of Melisende, Tamta encountered similar gender barriers. Women were considered as “underlings without complete intelligence,” as outlined in an article from *The Spectator*. In spite of this, Tamta, rising above her status, gained the ability to “act as a link between people of various faiths and backgrounds...govern, influence taxation, provided passage for pilgrimage and even, possibly, play a role in battles in Akhlat.”⁴⁶

Tamta’s story shines an interesting light on Melisende’s story, as the two differed in their level of exploitation by men. Melisende’s true success lay within her ability, as a female, to continually maintain a level of power throughout her lifetime. Despite her level of political influence fluctuating, she first gained power through her father ensuring that she jointly ruled and continued holding power through acting as regent for her son. Then, she maintained power through not granting Baldwin III’s wish to be crowned alone, and retaining control over Nablus after her territories were invaded.⁴⁷ Instead of conceding to male rule, she continually managed to preserve her power, thus asserting true female authority.

While Tamta was passed from man to man as an object, Melisende challenged the men in her life and gained their respect. In spite of various setbacks and deterrents, Melisende prevailed. She successfully maintained power despite both her husband and son attempting to remove her authority. Believing that she, as a female, was qualified to rule, she challenged Baldwin III when he requested that she transfer all power to him,

⁴⁶ A Christian Noblewoman with Clout in Medieval Turkey ...
www.spectator.co.uk/2017/07/a-christian-noblewoman-with-clout-in-medieval-turkey-tamtas-world-review-ed/.

⁴⁷Tranovich. *Queen Melisende of Jerusalem. The World of a Forgotten Crusader Queen*. Melisende, 2011.

and maintained political influence until her death.⁴⁸ Comparatively, Tamta did not hold any political influence until the Mongols chose to make her an independent ruler.⁴⁹

Having established the many obstacles Melisende faced in relation to her rule, it is essential to recognize the immense impact she left upon Jerusalem and the surrounding regions. Known for building structures during her reign, she embodied the position of a true monarch through continuing to promote artistic expression. Her court merged the artistic traditions of Byzantine, Europe, and Islam. Specifically, her patronage tactically helped ensure the loyalty of officials around her, particularly church officials. She remodelled the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, founded an abbey at Bethany, supported the building of the Church of St. James, and financed the Church of St. Anne's.⁵⁰ Particularly, her Armenian influence upon these structures can be seen through distinct choices like an Armenian decoration system featuring a frieze in the Church of St. James. As such, Melisende's artistic impact on various structures depicts the far reaching effects of her patronage.⁵¹ Determined to not only impact the present state of affairs, but also influence the future, Melisende utilized artistic patronage as both a method to obtain the support of the clergy and leave a permanent mark upon Jerusalem's culture. As seen through her actions, she was determined to be

⁴⁸ Huneycutt, Lois. "Female Succession and the Language of Power in the Writings of Twelfth-Century Churchmen." John Carmi Parsons, 1998

⁴⁹ Eastmond. *Tamta's World: The Life and Encounters of a Medieval Noblewoman from the Middle East to Mongolia*. East & West Publishing, 2011.

⁵⁰ Tranovich. *Queen Melisende of Jerusalem. The World of a Forgotten Crusader Queen*. Melisende, 2011.

⁵¹ Folda, Jaroslav. *Reassessing the Roles of Women as Makers of Medieval Art and Architecture*. Brill, 2015.

remembered in history like her male ancestors and leave a feminine touch upon structures of cultural significance.

Conclusion

This paper's historical analysis supports the argument that Melisende revolutionized a female's role within the political sphere. Through rising above the expectations of society and maintaining ruling power, she defined herself as a female of notable exception. Her actions promoted a wide range of possibilities for females in the future. Her rule demonstrated constant opposition to male oppression, methods through which women could obtain support, and practices through which a female could leave a permanent mark upon culture. Through refusing to back down to Fulk or Baldwin III, she successfully turned herself into a model of resilience and provided insight for future female rulers. As such, reflecting on her life leads to the conclusion that Melisende of Jerusalem acted as a truly transformative force for women.

Appendix

Image 1: “Melisende and Baldwin III Coronation” from Images of Queen Melisende in Manuscripts of William of Tyre’s History of Outremer



Bibliography

1. "A Letter from Bernard of Clairvaux, Abbot (1143-44)." *Radegund of Thuringia | Epistolae*, epistolae.ctl.columbia.edu/letter/246.html.

This letter was very helpful. It revealed the extent to which certain men believed in Melisende. As such, I utilized this source to show how a male acknowledging gender disparities promoted Melisende's ability to rule like a man.

2. "A Woman of Unusual Wisdom and Discretion – Queen Melisende of Jerusalem," Erenow, <https://erenow.com/postclassical/holywarriorsamodernhistoryofthecrusades/4.html>

This was another helpful source that I used for comparative purposes. This text described Arda, another Christian noblewoman that I compared Melisende with. Through using Arda as an example of women being treated of discardable objects, Melisende's successes seem far more remarkable.

3. "Baudouin III, Roi De Jérusalem." *geni_family_tree*, 29 Mar. 2018, www.geni.com/people/Baudouin-III-roi-de-Jérusalem/6000000001501000954.

This source was helpful because it described Melisende's ability to gain power. I used this to show how she obtained her son's trust and he allowed her to act as regent in his absence.

4. *Church of the Holy Sepulchre*, churchoftheholyssepulchre.net/.

This source was moderately helpful. I utilized it to display the significance of where Melisende is buried in comparison to other male rulers.

5. Dresvina, Juliana, and Nicholas Sparks. *Authority and Gender in Medieval and Renaissance Chronicles*. Cambridge Scholars, 2013.

This source was extremely helpful as it offered varying opinions in regard to Melisende's rule. I utilized this source to portray the public's view of her as a female monarch.

6. Eastmond. *Tamta's World: The Life and Encounters of a Medieval Noblewoman from the Middle East to Mongolia*. East & West Publishing, 2011.

This book described the life of the Christian noblewoman Tamta, who was also a woman that was able to gain power. As such, I this source was helpful in regard to comparing her life with Melisende's life and showing why Melisende was much more successful as a female ruler.

7. Folda, Jaroslav. "Images of Queen Melisende in Manuscripts of William of Tyres History of Outremer: 1250-1300." *Gesta*, vol. 32, no. 2, 1993, pp. 97–112., doi:10.2307/767168.

This source was very helpful. I used its depiction of Melisende to explain how the public had different perspectives regarding her as a ruler.

8. Folda, Jaroslav. *Reassessing the Roles of Women as Makers of Medieval Art and Architecture*. Brill, 2015.

This source was helpful because it provided specific examples of how Melisende left an artistic impact. I utilized this information to portray a clear example of her Armenian influence upon a church structure.

9. Guest. "Jerusalem in the Time of the Crusades." *Epdf.tips*, EPDF.TIPS, epdf.tips/jerusalem-in-the-time-of-the-crusades.html.

This source was not extremely helpful. I merely used it to portray where Melisende was buried.

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This source was not very helpful. I used it to briefly describe Melisende ruling as regent after her husband's death.

11. Huneycutt, Lois. "Female Succession and the Language of Power in the Writings of Twelfth-Century Churchmen." John Carmi Parsons, 1998

This source was very helpful. I used it to discuss gender roles and the expectations that Melisende was able to rise above.

12. Jansen, Sharon L. "The Monstrous Regiment of Women." *Carrie Chapman Catt: Suffragist, Political Activist, Organizer*, www.monstrousregimentofwomen.com/2015/08/melisende-queen-of-jerusalem.html.

This source helped provide details about her early life. I used this site to describe how and why Melisende received heritable power. However, this source was not very helpful, as it mostly provided information already covered by other sources.

13. Mayer, Hans Eberhard. "Angevins versus Normans: The New Men of King Fulk of Jerusalem." *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society Vol. 133, No. 1 (Mar., 1989) p. 2*

This source was helpful, as it detailed how Melisende and Fulk functioned as a married unit. Specifically, I used this source to detail the lack of respect Fulk first treated her with, and how this changed over time.

14. Mayer, Hans Eberhard. "Studies in the History of Queen Melisende of Jerusalem." *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, vol. 26, 1972, p. 93., doi:10.2307/1291317.

This source was extremely helpful. I utilized it during different points of the paper to show how Melisende came into rule and how she interacted with the men around her.

15. "Melisende." *Helena P. Schrader*, www.crusaderkingdoms.com/melisende.html.

This source was moderately helpful. I used it to describe the dynamics of Melisende and Fulk's relationship.

16. "Melisende – A True Queen," Loyola History Journal, <http://people.loyno.edu/~history/journal/1998-9/Edie.htm#6>

This source was extremely helpful as it touched upon Melisende's power as a female ruler and touched upon the females who ruled after her. I used the article to help depict the public's opinion of Melisende and relay specifics regarding her role.

17. Melisende Psalter." *The British Library*, The British Library, 14 Jan. 2015, www.bl.uk/collection-items/melisende-psalter.

This source was helpful. I utilized it to discuss the details of Fulk's gift to Melisende, and why individuals believe that the gift represents their reconciliation.

18. Phillips, Jonathan. *Holy Warriors: a Modern History of the Crusades*. Vintage Digital, 2012.

This source was very helpful. I utilized it as a further contrast to Melisende. The book discusses how difficult it was for most women to gain power within the political sphere, a hurdle she successfully overcame.

19. "Queen Melisende of Jerusalem." *Weapons and Warfare*, Weapons and Warfare, 13 Oct. 2016, weaponsandwarfare.com/2016/10/14/queen-melisende-of-jerusalem/.

This source was helpful as it recounted the history of rule before Melisende. I utilized this source to show specifics about male rule in Jerusalem before Melisende gained power.

20. "Queens Regnant: Melisende of Jerusalem – A wise Queen," History of Royal Women, <https://www.historyofroyalwomen.com/the-royal-women/queens-regnant-melisende-jerusalem/>

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21. "Queen Melisende of Jerusalem." *Reconesse Database - Delmira Agustini*, beta.reconesse.org/past/queen-melisende-of-jerusalem-1105-1161/.

This source was not very helpful. It discussed Melisende's early life. While I did not include most of these details, I utilized information from this source to discuss Morphia's role within the kingdom as wife to Baldwin II.

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This source was not particularly helpful. I briefly utilized it to further portray Melisende's actions as her son's regent.

24. Tranovich. *Queen Melisende of Jerusalem. The World of a Forgotten Crusader Queen*. Melisende, 2011.

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25. "Twelfth-Century Girl Power." *Asian and African Studies Blog*, blogs.bl.uk/digitisedmanuscripts/2013/08/twelfth-century-girl-power.html.

This source was helpful, as it explained Melisende's relationships with men. I utilized this source to portray how Melisende managed to maintain power despite being continually opposed by Baldwin III and Fulk.

26. "Women in Medieval Society." The British Library, The British Library, 17 Jan. 2014, www.bl.uk/the-middle-ages/articles/women-in-medieval-society.

This source was helpful as it describes how women were treated in the Middle Ages. I utilized this source for a comparative perspective, analyzing how Melisende superseded the females around her, as well as the expectations associated with her gender.

27. *Women in the Middle Ages* | *Middle Ages - The Finer Times*.
www.thefinertimes.com/Middle-Ages/women-in-the-middle-ages.html.

This source was moderately helpful. It further depicted the lives of women within the Middle Ages and I used it to portray the great successes Melisende obtained in spite of her gender.